



PCA Gear Checker



Accreditation

INTRODUCTION

‘We know there are many parents and supporters who would like to gear check if they knew what to do; this process will help them achieve that, and help their club.’

The PCA Gear Check Accreditation aims to provide knowledge and set standards of the gear check procedure for those carrying out gear checks at Pony Club®. Carrying out a comprehensive and standardised gear check is part of PCA’s risk management and compliance system. Successful applicants will receive a Gear Checker Certificate.

The purpose of a gear check is to:

- Identify and reduce risk
- Optimise the safety of the rider
- Protect the comfort and wellbeing of the horse
- Instil a sense of pride in the rider's quality of presentation at all Pony Club® activities
- Provide a safe environment for members, volunteers and spectators

All sports have their dress and equipment code, and participants must abide by that code if they wish to participate – Pony Club® is the same.

We know there are many parents and supporters who would like to gear check if they knew what to do; this process will help them achieve that, and help their club.

CERTIFICATE GUIDELINES

This certificate is designed for Pony Club® members 16yrs and over who have an interest in helping at rally days, musters, competitions, camps etc. as gear checkers. Clubs must have at least one qualified gear checker or current NCAS coach on the grounds to gear check in order to run a rally day or event.

The rules for approved/ appropriate gear can be found at
<https://ponyclubaustralia.com.au/sports/national-gear-rules/>

Riders and their mounts as a combination MUST be gear checked at ALL Pony Club® activities. This may include multiple times eg at a combined training, horse trials or one day event where gear changes can occur (eg dressage gear to jumping gear).

PRE-REQUISITES

Candidates for the gear checker certificate must:

- Be a current member of Pony Club Australia
- Meet the requirements for Working with Children in the relevant Australian State/Territory
- Be at least 16 years to receive the accreditation
- Have attended and observed gear check procedure at two separate rally, muster or Pony Club® run events, prior to assessment, and
- Have been supervised performing gear check procedure on two separate occasions at rally, muster or Pony Club® run events, prior to assessment.

ASSESSMENT

Assessment will include:

- A practical gear check before a qualified assessor.
- Completing an open book examination on gear/ uniform rules. This is to be completed before the practical assessment.

* The following people are eligible assessors:

- Current PCANCAS Level One coaches as invited by the Club/Zone conducting the assessment.
- State approved current PCANCAS Preliminary coaches
- Other state approved officials

RENEWALS

Gear Check Certificates are valid for a period of four years or part thereof and must be renewed by having performed gear check procedure at 12 rallies, musters or Pony Club® run events over the preceding four year period, signed off by the DC(s), head coach or club president. Renewing applicants must also declare they are aware of the latest National Gear Rules and any changes that may have occurred.

PRACTICAL GEAR CHECK GUIDELINES

It is essential that the gear checker has reviewed the current PCA National Gear Rules (as found on the PCA website) so they know what is allowed and not allowed for the discipline to be ridden. They can refer back to these rules if/when required. It is advised to have a copy at the gear check point.

Gear checking is to be done with a hands-on approach (subject to COVID or other health orders). Failure to adequately see, feel and verify the standard and compliance of gear means that gear has not been checked properly.

Because gear checking requires the gear checker to touch gear, it is therefore recommended that hand sanitiser be available at the gear checking station. This is particularly important for biosecurity reasons when moving from one horse/rider combination to the next.

A non-contact gear check may be required in order to comply with health directives. In this situation the gear checker will rely on a parent to assist by lifting saddle flaps or otherwise assisting the gear checker to view the rider's gear.

In keeping with PCA Risk Management and Sun Smart Policies, all officials (gear checkers / judges / team managers / examiners / coaches / stewards / technical delegates / marshals etc), should be suitably attired with covered-in footwear, hats, long sleeved tops.

GEAR CHECK METHOD

There are a number of ways a Pony Club® can perform gear checks at rally days or musters. This will depend on what the club feels it is most appropriate and how many people are accredited to do the gear checks. Three options are:

1. Individual riders are unmounted (stirrups up) and lead their horse correctly to the gear checker who is in a central location. They don't mount until they are gear checked on ground, then mount to complete gear check (eg so the gear checker can check foot in the stirrup, girth tightness etc OR
2. Gear checking from the troop line before being put in their groups. Bring odd numbers (1,3,5,7) forward at least two horse lengths to ensure that there is plenty of room between horses so that the riders are safe and horses are not able to kick each other. Riders present unmounted then are checked and mount to complete gear check.

Whichever system you use, have a systematic approach to gear checking so you don't miss anything. For example, always start on the near side of the horse, with the rider standing at the horse's head facing forward, and begin in this manner:

1. Introduce yourself to the rider (if you don't already know him/her) or say hello if you do.
2. Tell the rider that you are going to do a gear check, ask if the horse is safe to approach.
3. Approach at a 45-degree angle to the front of the horse.

To ensure no steps are missed, a suitable gear check template can be found in Appendix 1.

ADJUSTING GEAR

If any gear does not comply or does not fit correctly you must ask the rider and/or parents or team manager to either change it or give you permission to do so. It is important that the parent or rider are competent to make this adjustment; if not the gear checker should adjust the gear.

At rallies and musters, gear checkers and coaches should insist on alterations so that the correct fit can be assessed. Adjusting the height of a bit in the horse's mouth may need to be gradual. A leather punch, spare numnah, wither pads and stirrup leathers could be useful to have on hand. It is the gear checker's responsibility in this situation to teach the rider/parent the correct fitting of all equipment. A gear checker should supervise any gear changes (eg punching extra holes in stirrup leathers) rather than do it themselves. An inexperienced gear checker may need to get a more experienced gear checker to confirm their decision to alter gear before proceeding.

A gear checker should use discretion if appropriate: If a rider arrives with incorrect (rather than unsafe or illegal) gear, for example incorrect colour saddlecloth at a rally or muster, do not change immediately; the first step is to assess the horse and rider. Kindly let the rider know the rules and suggest alternatives they could use. Get them to try the recommendation before the next rally, either at home with a parent or at the rally with their coach to make sure they have control of their horse during the gear change. As long as the head coach feels they are safe, they are still able to participate on the day but must have correct gear the next rally.

At competitions, any ill-fitting or unsafe gear must be noted on the Gear Check Report Form (Appendix 2). Only names of riders (and their club) and the incorrect, ill-fitting, or unsafe gear should be recorded on this sheet. In the event of a dispute, assistance should be sought from either the Chief Steward, Chief Judge or Ground Jury. Comments on the form must show each rider re-presents successfully, and the form is to be given to the scorers in case anyone does not re-present.

The reasons we gear check:

Safety – Correct fit of helmet and stirrups.

Soundness of leather including stretching, cracking, stitching, Discipline specific rules.

Horse's comfort – correct fit saddle, bridle, bit, soft, clean gear, supple gear.

The most important thing about gear checking is if something is found to be unsafe or not fitting properly you need to assist the rider to overcome this. Rider safety and horse welfare and comfort are paramount. Do not let these things go uncorrected. If there is an issue, alternate gear needs to be found for use and gear checked before riding can continue.

EQUIPMENT TO CHECK (NOTE: Gear should be clean as sweat, sand or mud can rub the horse.)

BRIDLE: - Check that all stitching and leather is in good order and that it fits the horse properly and comfortably, according to fitting guidelines in the PCA National Gear Rules. All straps should be in their keepers.

Fit of brow band - The brow band should sit comfortably across the forehead and below the ears. It should be wide enough so that it does not pull the ears forward.

Fit of noseband/s - Depends on the type of noseband and its purpose but must allow 1.5-2cm between noseband and horse at the bridge of the nose. Devices are available for this measuring. Nosebands must not interfere with the horse's breathing.

- Cavesson noseband should sit between the protruding cheek bone and the bit and should allow two fingers on edge between the noseband and the cheek bone.
- Dropped noseband sits above the horse's nostrils and in the curb groove.
- Hanoverian noseband – the Cavesson should sit one finger below the protruding cheek bone. Flash strap must sit above the nostrils and sit in the curb groove – it also must be firm but not tight.
- Grackle or crossover noseband – The strap goes through the loops of the headpiece and the crossover of the strap must sit above the nostrils (it is advisable to have padding on the nose bone where it crosses over)

If a noseband is used with any bit with a chain, any lower strap must be removed. (e.g., Hanoverian, Drop, Grackle etc noseband)

For correct fitting of nosebands see Appendix 9 of the National gear rules

Fit of throat lash - The purpose of the throat lash is to prevent the bridle slipping over the horse's head. It should be done up making sure it is firm enough to stop the bridle coming off but also not to tight that when the horse is asked to work on the bit or collection it is not in contact with the horse's throat.

Fit of cheek straps - The cheek straps must be of the correct length to keep the bit in place when the bit is in the correct position in the horse's mouth, (The horse should not have to hold the bit up) *** Check that all straps are through the keepers ***

EAR COVERS/BONNETS/EAR HOODS

The ear cover/fly hood/ bonnet may be made of material that provides for sound reduction.

Ear Plugs are not permitted.

Bonnet and hoods must not be tied down to the noseband.

Fit of bit - The gear checker should be familiar with different types of bits permitted in the PCA National Gear Rules.

- Check whether it is an allowable bit for the discipline (allowable bits are those shown in the National Gear Rules).
- HEIGHT: When the bit is in the horse's mouth the bridle cheekpieces should be adjusted so that it sits comfortably relative to the horse's anatomy. (Horses' mouths can vary greatly so the rule of 'two wrinkles at the corner of the horse's mouth' as the correct height is no longer advised).
- LENGTH: The bit length must not be so narrow as to pinch and/or rub the sides of the horse's mouth, nor so wide as to be pulled sideways through the mouth.

(Left below) For a loose ring snaffle or any bit with moveable rings, make sure that the horse's lips completely clear the bit ring holes by 1-3mm on each side. Otherwise, the horse's skin can become pinched into the holes as the action of the loose ring works with the rein.

(Right, below) There should be a snug fit for a fixed cheekpiece bit. We need to avoid the mouthpiece being able to slide across the tongue and bars. If this happens, it makes it difficult for a horse to give a rider a clear connection to hand. This can vary slightly depending on how many joints the bit has.



- Check for cleanliness of bit and any sign of wear.
- Bits must have a diameter of not less than 10mm.
- Check that the bit has no sharp edges etc.

REINS:

- Reins must be joined. (Split reins that are not joined are allowed in campdrafting only. Split reins can be used in other sports or training, provided they are joined by a buckle, knot, or securely taped so as to not allow movement at join of reins or any likelihood of reins coming undone or apart.)
- Check the stitching is not coming undone and leather is sound.
- Reins are attached to the bit using buckles or billets or bit clips). Buckles face outwards, billets face inwards.
- Reins must not be too long (i.e., the loop of the reins, when the rider is holding the reins in the normal riding position, should never be able to go over the rider's foot).
- If a knot is made in reins to shorten them the buckle at the end must be undone.
- Bit clips, if used, must face inward. Clips must be taped for Mounted Games

SADDLE:

Check that:

- The saddle should not have any pressure on the horse's spine from a downward or sideways position. If it does, other arrangements need to be made. Different saddle, saddle riser pad etc.
- Check all stitching – girth points, girth buckles, stirrup leathers.
- Check that the correct girth is being used (two buckles or one buckle with a surcingle). Note some Stock saddles are permitted with a single buckle girth (Bates Fastener). Check the National Gear Rules for what is allowed.

Check that the girth is done up firmly so that the saddle does not roll or move backwards or forwards. But also check it is not too tight to cause discomfort. With the girth done up firmly, you should still be able to slide your fingers comfortably between the girth and the horse's sternum.

SADDLE CLOTH

One only saddlecloth with /without a riser pad is permitted. Riser pads can be a commercial riser or gel pad or sheepskin numnah. Makeshift padding: Folded/rolled saddlecloths, towels and other makeshift padding are not permitted.

STIRRUPS - VERY IMPORTANT:

- Stirrup irons cannot be too large or too small for the rider's boots; both are dangerous.
- There should be a minimum of 15mm and maximum of 20mm gap between the widest part of the rider's boot and the stirrup. Preferably use an object of this size to measure the gap. A piece of dowel is preferable to using a finger.
- The only exception to this gap is where a rider with large feet is already using the maximum size stirrup iron commercially available (currently 140mm or 5 ½ inches). These riders must use breakaway stirrups, toe cages or safety stirrups.
- Avoid stirrups that are too large – the rider's foot should not be able to slip through.
- Tie downs and fixed stirrup points are not permitted. There must be no restriction or attachment of any kind.

OTHER GEAR

(Such as martingales, cruppers, breastplates, whips, spurs etc.)

All gear should be checked for fit and safety (e.g., stitching, excessive wear, and tear). Running martingales should be long enough to allow the reins to go in a straight line from the rider's hands to the bit when the horse's head is in a normal position i.e., when the nose is approximately in line with the wither.

Whips: Whip loops must be cut. All whips must have a flap or lash; except hacking canes which are for presentation purposes only in the show ring. The whip flap cannot be altered. Check National Gear Rules for permitted whips.

Spurs: Permitted spurs must not exceed 45mm including heel band. The end of the spur shank must be blunt, and the arms of the spur must be smooth. Curved shanks must only be worn with the shank directed downwards. The shank must not be less than 7mm in width at the end of shank (spur end nearest horse)

Rowel spurs (permitted in specific disciplines) must: - meet the maximum length of 45mm - have a free running rowel, and the edge of the rowel must be blunt /smooth - have the rowel on a vertical plane - have a rowel thickness of a 20c coin at the outside edge - have a shank tip which does not point up or inwards.

Soft touch spurs with a rolling ball or broad disc on either plane must: - if they have a curved shank, have the curve pointing downward and not change direction, with the shank jutting from the centre back of the heel, not the side.

The end of a spur strap points to the outside.

The full spur list, with photos, is in the National Gear Rules.



Correctly fitted for right foot



Too loose and too low



Upside down and too high



Shanks come from side of the spur

RIDER:

Helmet: It is important to check that the helmet is the correct standard as listed in National Gear Rules.

Ensure the rider's helmet is fitted correctly – too loose and it might slip over the rider's eyes, too tight and it will give the rider a headache. Hair should be tied back so it does not get in the rider's face.

A helmet only protects what it covers. A helmet should sit low at the front to protect the forehead; it should fit snugly but comfortably. With a correctly adjusted harness, you cannot remove the helmet, or roll it backward or forward, to expose the forehead, obscure vision or hit the nose. For the correct fit the helmet should be comfortable and the skin on the forehead should move with the helmet; if not the helmet is too loose.

As a Gear Checker you may ask the rider to demonstrate correct helmet fit by placing one hand on top of the helmet and moving helmet from side to side, and back and forwards.

Helmet tags on the harness that show when the helmet is still within date, are permitted. However, they do not replace a physical inspection of a helmet by a gear checker.



A well fitted helmet (including peak horizontal to the ground)

Jewellery: Check for any jewellery that is not permitted.

Boots: Check boots have full, smooth soles and textured tread must be no more than 3mm in depth. The boots must have a low but defined and square cut heel at least 14mm high. If the boots have laces, the ends are to be tucked in for safety.

Uniform: Check uniform is appropriate for the occasion.

HORSE:

Boots and bandages:

- Check that the boots are done up correctly – fastenings to the outside of the leg and Velcro done up on the outside of the leg with the slack of the Velcro pointing to the rear.
- They are correct size and clean.
- Bandages must have padding underneath and be stitched.
Taping of bandages and boots is not permitted.

General: Check the horse for any visual signs of distress or injury (cuts, spur injuries etc.) If the horse has blood in the mouth or from an open wound, it should not be ridden. You can provide helpful information on condition, weight, coat etc. Check that the horse's shoes are not loose (if shod) and no nails protruding. You can provide helpful information if horse needs trimming or to be reshod.

If the saddle is ill fitting and is going to cause the horse discomfort, you should try borrowing a saddle pad, or use a riser to help the situation.

NOTE: - If any gear does not comply or does not fit correctly you must ask the rider and/or parents or Team Manager to either change it or give you permission to do so.

If you are queried or picked up with a problem with your gear, please remember that the Gear Checker is not there to cause a problem, but to ENSURE FAIRNESS IN THE SPORT and, more importantly, SAFETY. A gentle warning to parents and riders – please take care before you go out competing that you find out the Gear Checking Rules for the Activity/Discipline in which you are competing (they differ!) so that you have a trouble-free gear check.

When in doubt the National Gear Rules must be consulted.

GEAR CHECKING TEMPLATES

The following pages have a suggested order of procedure gear checkers can use.

Remember:

- Always start a gear check gear with riders off the horse. Any adjustments that may need to be made should be made with the rider off the horse. Finish with them mounted so you can have a final look at girth, stirrup length and fit, buckle of reins wont catch on the rider's boot, saddle not pressing on horse's back etc.
- Safety – Soundness of leather including stretching, cracking, stitching and correct fit.
- Helmet and stirrups
- Discipline specific rules must apply
- Horse's comfort – correct fit saddle, bridle, bit, soft, clean gear, supple gear.

Templates enclosed:

1. Individual rider gear check template – intemised for newer gear checkers
2. Individual rider gear check template – simpler for experienced gear checkers
3. Gear checker report form – for riders at who need to re-present
4. Multiple rider gear check template – eg for events

Gear check form - Itemised

Rider name _____ **Club** _____

Horse _____ **Date** _____

Riders must seek assistance to correct and then re-present if any item does not pass.

| * If applicable | Pass | 2nd | Comment if required |
|------------------------|------|-----|---------------------|
| Body protector * | | | |
| Helmet | | | |
| Riding boots | | | |
| Uniform | | | |
| Spurs * | | | |
| Whip * | | | |
| Jewellery | | | |
| Bit | | | |
| Bridle | | | |
| Browband | | | |
| Cheekpiece | | | |
| Headpiece/throatlash | | | |
| Noseband | | | |
| Reins | | | |
| Saddle | | | |
| Cantle/pommel | | | |
| Stirrup bars | | | |
| Girth | | | |
| Girth points | | | |
| Saddle cloth | | | |
| Stirrup leathers | | | |
| Stirrup irons | | | |
| Martingale/breastplate | | | |
| Grass rein /crupper * | | | |
| Hooves/horseshoes | | | |
| Horse boots/bandages | | | |
| Other | | | |
| | | | |

Gear checker initials _____

Gear check form – Individual

Rider name _____ **Club** _____

Horse _____ **Date** _____

Riders must seek assistance to correct and then re-present if any item does not pass.

| * If applicable | Pass | 2nd | Comment if required |
|---|------|-----|---------------------|
| Body protector * | | | |
| Helmet | | | |
| Riding boots | | | |
| Uniform | | | |
| Spurs * | | | |
| Whip * | | | |
| Jewellery | | | |
| Bit, bridle | | | |
| Saddle and attachments eg breastplate | | | |
| Hooves and general presentation of horse | | | |
| Boots/bandages | | | |
| Other | | | |
| | | | |

Gear checker initials _____

| | |
|---|-----------------|
| GEAR CHECKERS REPORT FORM For incorrect, ill-fitting, or unsafe gear | |
| Event: | Date: |
| Venue: | Host Club/Zone: |
| Gear Checker: | Time: |
| | |

| CLUB | RIDER | No. | Team Manager | Problem | How Resolved |
|------|-------|-----|--------------|---------|--------------|
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Gear check form

Gear Checker name _____ Event _____ Date _____

* If applicable

| No. | Rider details | Body protector * | Helmet | Uniform | Spurs, whip * | Bridle | Saddle | Hooves, boots | Other | Comments |
|-----|---------------|------------------|--------|---------|---------------|--------|--------|---------------|-------|----------|
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